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THE REFASHIONING OF CATHOLICISM, 1450–1700

A REASSESSMENT OF THE COUNTER
REFORMATION

ROBERT BIRELEY

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Loyola University Chicago*



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PREFACE

In this book I have attempted a synthetic treatment of early modern Catholicism, that is, Catholicism from roughly 1450 to 1700. My reassessment aims to show how over this period Catholicism actively refashioned itself in response to the profound changes of the long sixteenth century and how it was in turn reshaped by these changes. So I find in the Catholicism of the period another instance of Christianity's continual and necessary accommodation to contemporary society and culture. My book proposes that the best way for us to understand early modern Catholicism is precisely in terms of this response to the changing world of which it was part. In our own day Christianity is undergoing a more profound reshaping.

I have written this book as an introduction to early modern Catholicism for advanced undergraduates and the general public, and as an attempt at a new interpretation for colleagues and scholars that takes into account recent scholarship and that goes beyond the usual terms 'Catholic Reform' and 'Counter Reformation'. Brevity has been in order, and I have necessarily been selective in the material that I have treated. Lack of space, and competence, has compelled me to pass over in large measure some areas of which the reader might legitimately have expected a more complete discussion, for example, English Catholicism, the French Religious Wars, and the arts. Yet I trust to have achieved a scope broad enough for a genuine synthesis. Because of their interest as well as their importance, personalities play a major part in the narrative. Given the choice of annotating extensively or expanding the text, I have opted for the latter. A Select Bibliography at the end will, I hope, at least partially compensate for the lack of notes.

I owe a debt of gratitude to many folks who have assisted me in the preparation of this book, but to three in particular. John W. O'Malley, SJ, of the Weston School of Theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, carefully read the whole manuscript and furnished me with invaluable assistance.

My graduate research assistant in the spring of 1998, Elisabeth Fraterrigo, also read the complete manuscript and with her keen journalistic eye much improved the writing. Susan Schroeder, Professor of Latin American History at Loyola University, who carefully read Chapter 7, saved me from many errors and helped with the style. I am also grateful to the anonymous reader for Macmillan for his helpful suggestions. Many years ago I learned from two of my mentors, Professor Francis Paul Prucha, SJ, of Marquette University, and Professor Dieter Albrecht of the University of Regensburg, that there is no such thing as a perfect book. The shortcomings of this one are my responsibility.

The Jesuit Community at Loyola University has provided me with moral and financial support, and for this I am grateful, especially to the then Rector, Father Lawrence Reuter, SJ. The director of the Inter-library Loan at Loyola's Cudahy Library, Lorna Newman, and her staff have with their usual remarkable efficiency obtained many books for my use. Jeremy Black, editor of the series 'European History in Perspective', invited me to undertake this book. Jonathan Reeve, the History Commissioning Editor at Macmillan, has been most helpful. They both merit my gratitude.

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